

Madonna, women without Qualities. Who will join in this laughter?

Jinshil Lee(Art Critic)

Jang Pa's paintings in this exhibition show the perversity and visual pleasure of female sexuality, which she has been exploring since her 2015 <Lady X series>, expand and diverge into another iconological and allegorical zone. The new works with titles such as <Mama series>, <A Common Woman series>, and <Man from Earth>, can be said to be works that more specifically and stereoscopically reference and translate the art historical and cultural symbols surrounding the shape of 'femininity', which has been the subject of Jang Pa's research. Laid out as an inverted exegesis and contaminated hermeneutics, Jang Pa's canvas once again radiates primary colors of red and grotesque figures. Yet the multilateral methodologies, ranging from medieval religious iconography to shaped canvases without edges or straight lines, provide an interesting opportunity to carefully re-examine the possibilities and outlines of feminist painting that the artist Jang Pa is seeking.

The first thing that stands out in this year's new works is that the Christian icons of Jesus and the Virgin Mary are directly referenced. Painted on a large scale canvas over 2 meters long, <Triangle of Lamentation>(2022) is an adaptation of Michelangelo's marble sculpture <The Deposition>, also called 'the Bandini Pieta'. The person in the center right behind the collapsing body of Jesus in Michelangelo's unfinished pieta, which reveals the climax of the grievance for the killing of god, is a biblical character named Nicodemus (who Vasari considered to be a carving of Michelangelo's own face). Unlike in other Pieta, a dwarfed mother Mary supports the body on the left, while the woman supporting him on the right with her cheek against his is Mary Magdalene. In Jang Pa's painting, this triangular composition surrounding Christ is subtly rearranged, and the form of colors and lines also creates another web of secret and heretical meaning. From the abdomen of the helpless Christ, abject shapes that Jang Pa had been painting thus far pour out like ruptured intestines. 'Man-Nicodemus-Michelangelo', who was at the apex in the triangular composition that was a metaphor of the Holy Trinity, is not only of unknown gender, and instead of being sad, has a smooth face like a mask with empty eyes and a gloomy expression. Mary is connected with the figure of Christ in the image itself where the bleeding paint and the blood vessels are vividly entangled like a bloodshot membrane. Mary Magdalene is half shrouded in a dark,

black-blue color, and stares with piercing eyes, terrifying the viewer. What is this painting's original material? Is it a version of the Bible named the Gospel of John, or the death of a man in AD 33, or Michelangelo's unfinished sculpture? Jang Pa shakes and rearranges these three 'originals that are not originals', and experiments how the paradigms of holiness and lowliness, birth and demise, figure and ground, and sin and desire in the great historical symbolism, can be re-established and re-contextualized through the sensibility of painting.

In <A Common Woman Series>, the iconography of Virgin Mary holding baby Jesus is also splendidly and disparately embodied. Through works of persistent research over the past two years, Jang Pa has been digging into the historical stratum of female figures that have accumulated since ancient times, while presenting archival works that scan through images of 'misogyny' on contemporary screens. Above all, the Madonna and Child image and the stigma of Jesus are the negative allegories of femininity that have been imprinted in the holy signs, and are key icons showing how femininity and motherhood have been disembodied in Christianity. Some may be aghast at the provocation and intellectual prowess of the artist, who has labeled them 'common woman' and 'a woman without qualities' while appropriating these sacred icons. But these paintings that radiate lewd mystery and blasphemous play are not an attack on religion itself, but rather an interrogation that reveals the reality of masculine fear and fetish hidden inside the symbol of incarnation. It is a scathing revelation that the symbolic system of Christianity was constructed as an illusion that reversed the causality of woman, mother, body, ground, and material, that the incarnation of Christ - 'God who was made into human flesh and died' - is merely a concave mirror of inverted image about the fact that God was born from a woman's body. In Jang Pa's canvas, the rough brush strokes that depict the ghost-like form of mother and child and the 'holes' that emit light can be seen as a highly frigid hammering that smashes such a mirror. The motherhood of the Virgin Mary, rising from the cracked and shattered surfaces of this mirror, manifests an unknown eeriness, a kind of ghastly coldness. The filthy, insidious and relentless form of Mary as both a dangerous hybrid and dichotomy between a suffering/woeful mother and a prostitute/bitch, is perhaps the most scathing counterattack to the maternal ideology that has long been almost sacrosanct.

As is well known, Julia Kristeva, in 『Pouvoirs de L'horreur』, referred as the abject,

that which is separated and abandoned in order to become a subject. This 'object that is not an object', which eventually becomes the 'object' of primal oppression, is a process of separation from the totality of mother prior to becoming someone, an attempt to deprive the mother of the instance to becoming a subject, and an abominable boundary that can only be revisited perversely. This is the fate of femininity that can only participate in the symbolic system or the sacred order through a series of separations, not just on the ontogenic level, but also on cultural and historical level. As uncleanness, filth, and blood must be purified through a sacrifice ritual, meat and woman are linked as a pair. The mother is the place where, as a lump of meat in which this fundamental shield activates, as a bleeding beast, and as a source of contamination, the negativity that coexist in meat and women is ultimately condensed. The 'Mother-Symbol', which culminates in the Virgin Mary as a chaste vessel and benevolent mediator, is the method through which civilized society – especially the Christian symbolic system – has tamed the mighty power of reproduction whilst also neutralizing the fear of the body's uncontrollability, thus absorbing and desomatizing a woman's body.

These works, which visualize the maternal points of fear and abject by re-contaminating the Pieta, are another sluice opened up by Jang Pa's female sexuality as an abject in the <Lady-X series>, and this creates another zone of transgressive pleasure. Retaining the rough brush strokes and compositional motifs of the <Lady-X series>, the <Mama series> fill the canvas with images of monsters in which shapes that are reminiscent of organs such as eyeballs, intestines, fetuses, and testicles are heterogeneously entangled with each other, spilling over and falling out of the skin and skeleton. This disgusting, creepy, gloppy and proliferating maternal corporeality that was named 'Mother', radiates dazzlingly intense colors and a play of brutally innocent creation of form from the surface of the painting. These paintings remove the shield of sublime and chastity, and instead rapturously lays out the very entanglement and dynamism of contaminants that should have been swept away through sacrifice rituals. Jang Pa's strategy of bringing the deified, mysticized, and ideologized motherhood down to earth, while at the same time replacing the physical properties of the body that is imprinted with disgust and fear with sensual pleasures of color and form, carries out 'blasphemy as an irony'. It is a strategy in the rhetoric of materialist feminist that Donna Haraway herself proclaimed at the opening of <A Cyborg Manifesto>, a serious play and scathing humor that is bursting with tension due to its seemingly

constant demand for seriousness whilst bearing both sides of incompatible contradictions.